

(TMI Newsletter - February 8, 2012)

A LONG VIEW OF TMI: RECOLLECTIONS FROM GEORGE DURRETTE



The long view is shared by many. Collectively it is The Monroe Institute story. We are fortunate to have books and recordings of Bob Monroe, but there are dozens of other backstories, rich in the history of TMI, waiting to be told.

George Durette

Below are recollections from George Durette's long view. George likes to remain behind the scenes, anonymous to most of the folks who travel here from across the planet, but his mark is on everything.

Bob Monroe had his sights set on George. He wanted George to come work for him. It's possible that George Durette may hold the distinction of keeping Bob on a string longer than anyone else. It was TMI's good fortune that George did eventually acquiesce. After that, neither he nor Bob looked back.



In 1970, Bob and Nancy Monroe and family lived at Whistlefield, their lovely four-hundred-acre spread in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Afton, Virginia. Adjoining Whistlefield was a cattle farm owned by George and Lavern Durette. Seeing George out working his cows one day, Bob drove over to introduce himself.

Maybe it was the cattle that initially piqued Bob's curiosity, whose fondness for extremely rare beef was a lifelong pattern. On learning that George also worked as a short order cook for Howard Johnson's on Afton Mountain, Bob began eating there, always ordering the same meal—a raw warmed hamburger with sautéed onions and a glass of milk. If the standard order weren't served to his liking, Bob would stroll back into the kitchen and insist that George prepare it.



One day Bob stopped by the Durrettes' place and invited George, Lavern, and their young son Bunky, on a tour of the Whistlefield property. At the end of the tour Bob asked George to quit his job at Howard Johnson's and come work for him full time. George was leery. He felt he barely knew Bob and told him so. "George, I've never met a stranger," was the reply. Unconvinced, George put him off.

Sometime later Bob again stopped by and asked, "George, do you drink?" George said, no, he didn't drink. "Well, come over and have some tea." They had tea, talked, and got to know each other a little better. Bob again pressed George to work for him. This time George made a counter offer. He agreed to help Bob as a neighbor, no money involved, insuring that Bob would not be in control of George's time. Bob accepted.

The arrangement persisted for years. Although George didn't receive a paycheck, Bob made gift contributions throughout the year in appreciation of George's services. During this time Bob asked George to coordinate the manufacture of tiny inexpensive houses, eventually constructing two at Whistlefield—the Lab, complete with a CHEC unit, and the Owl House guesthouse.

After five years Bob was ready for a change. "I'm tired of you working for nothing. Have you decided to come and work for me yet, George?" To which George replied, "I've decided to come to work for you now." In 1975 they made it official.

Around the same time Bob, along with his stepdaughter, "right-hand man" Nancy (Scooter) Honeycutt, physicist Tom Campbell, and engineer, Dennis Mennerich, began training groups of people using Hemi-Sync®. Some of those early programs were held at the nearby Tuckahoe Motel, which allowed them to wire it for sound! George would pick up food for the participants at Howard Johnson's, his former employer.

Quickly, interest in the programs spread. The Episcopal Diocesan Center conference facility in Richmond was rented for weekend M-5000 workshops, precursors to the Gateway Voyage®. George would take a truckload of mattresses to Richmond on Thursday nights and pick them up the next Sunday evening.

In 1976 Bob purchased eight hundred acres of new land in Nelson County, just a few miles from Whistlefield. Bob took George over to look at it—the future home of TMI, Roberts Mountain Farm, and the New Land community. Things were moving to the next level.

George and a small crew loaded the contents of Whistlefield piece by piece and trucked it to the New Land. When the big barn was completed they moved into it the Lab and Owl House gear, and the farm equipment, plus household furnishings and belongings. It was a huge undertaking, but not the hugest.

Bob's plan was to create a sustainable community that could live off the grid if necessary. He envisioned a lake well stocked with varieties of edible fish, verdant gardens year around with

the help of four enormous greenhouses from Whistlefield, onsite fuel pumps, and livestock raised on the farm. Bob and George brought in George's herd of beef cattle, whose descendants grace our pastures today.

George shakes his head at the memory of moving those green houses. "The hardest thing Bob threw at me in 1977 was dismantling the greenhouses—four buildings, each three hundred and sixty-five feet long and sixty feet wide. Larger than a football field." George moved nineteen thousand pieces of twenty-by-twenty-inch glass. Although the lake, the fuel pumps, and the farm did become realities, the greenhouses were never reconstructed.

Eager to begin hosting programs, Bob's priority was completing the structures required for participants. That meant that his and Nancy's new home was put on hold. Meanwhile they gamely camped out in a series of temporary quarters, including the cabin of a friend, the lower floor of the unfinished Center building, and the top of the gatehouse. George recalls that when Nancy and Bob lived in the Center, late at night Bob would make his tapes in the trainer room behind the kitchen.

In 1979 the first group of participants arrived at the Center. Interest in the New Land Community gained momentum as program grads experienced the peace and beauty of this magical land and began building here. Today the New Land subdivision is home to more than forty-five households.

As the community grew, inevitably so did George's reputation as a local hero. Early on, the roads were difficult to navigate in snow and ice. George and his crew seemed to instantly appear when someone was stuck or otherwise needed assistance. They'd rescue the car and often carry the driver to his or her destination. As more homes began construction, George had a hand in many of them.

Even-tempered and difficult to ruffle, George was who you wanted to see when things got dicey. Nancy Honeycutt McMoneagle has known George more than half of her life. "George always took the high road," she says. "He's philosophical, always a positive influence on everybody. My sisters, brother, and I are very fortunate to have George in our lives."

Community members planned a big appreciation event in 1987—George Durette Day. Not only is George shy of the spotlight, he's observant and clever, so—how to surprise him? The game was on. For everyone to arrive at David Francis Hall, park, and get into the conference room undetected, George had to be occupied elsewhere. Joe McMoneagle lured George down to the big barn on the pretext of needing him to find some obscure piece of hardware. To Joe's chagrin George quickly located and exhumed it. Nevertheless, Joe managed to stall him further, and got him to the party on time! All the planning and subterfuge paid off when we saw the look on George's face as he walked into that room amid cheering and applause.

Looking back forty-two years, we asked George what was the key to his long and successful partnership with Bob Monroe. "He trusted me," was the reply. "He gave me ninety-five percent

of the say-so having to do with the land, facilities, farm. I always worked for him like I would work for myself.”

And, finally, how would George describe Bob? “He was a strange man. He was a changeable person. He would tell you to do something today. If you didn’t do it today, tomorrow it would be different. I always did what he asked right away—I beat him to the punch. You never knew what he was thinking. We were more like partners than employee-employer. After working for Bob for twenty-five years at the time he passed, I never felt a day that I would quit him.”

George Durette passed away on January 19, 2016, following a heart attack. He is greatly missed.

Painting by Mike George, Photo by Leslie France.